DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 961 EF 006 225

TITLE	Historic Schools: A Roadmap for Saving Your School.
INSTITUTION	National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	11p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/school_study_roadmap.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Advocacy; Citizen Participation; Community Support; Educational Facilities Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Schools
IDENTIFIERS	*Historical Preservation

ABSTRACT

This brief suggests that not every historic school can or even should be saved, but all too often, historicschools and options for renovation are routinely dismissed without full consideration of alternatives or community input. The article further asserts that many schools are either abandoned ordemolished simply because of their age, as school administrators argue that theycannot be preserved and adapted to meet modern educational program needs.The article suggests that as residents, parents, elected officials, or school board members, there are various ways to get noticed, participate, and ultimately advocate for saving a historic neighborhood school. The included strategies serve as a road map to help get started, ask the right questions, follow leads, identify warning signs, and build support. The strategies include: (1) get familiar with the process (school facility evaluations, inflated school renovation cost estimates and prejudices, state reimbursement rules, acreage standards); (2) understand the perspective of the educator and the community (find your target audience, recognize the needs of children, consider the educator's point of view, be sensitive to socio-economic and racial issues, maintain civility, anticipate the process); (3) organize stakeholders (engage the school community, form alliances, bring in the experts); (4) plan for obstacles and success (seek funding to support your effort; recognize the human factor); (5) confront the challenge (understand the case for replacement); and others. (EV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 469 961

NATIONAL TRUST
for HISTORIC PRESERVATION

HISTORIC SCHOOLS:
A ROADMAP FOR SAVING YOUR SCHOOL

Not every historic school can or even should be saved. But all too often, historic schools and options for renovation are routinely dismissed without full consideration of alternatives or community input. Many schools are either abandoned or demolished simply because of their age, as school administrators argue that they cannot be preserved and adapted to meet modern educational program needs. What's a community to do? Many residents feel powerless to intervene or participate in what is often a highly charged political process. It does not have to be this way.

As residents, parents, elected officials, or school board members, there are various ways to get noticed, participate and ultimately advocate for saving your historic neighborhood school. In preparing this fact sheet, we searched for tested methods for building community support. The following strategies serve as a roadmap to help you get started, ask the right questions, follow leads, identify warning signs, and build support.

Get Familiar with the Process

Most state departments of education have created a series of publications, programs and administrative procedures that set out the process for school facility improvements – usually available online. Oftentimes these guide decisions by school districts and their architects in evaluating existing schools, and establish design standards for new construction and for renovation.

Depending on the state, waivers or variances may be allowed. For preservation advocates and neighborhood leaders, it is critical to understand these standards and how best to participate within the process. Be aware that many state departments of education respond primarily to the local school district applicant. They can be unresponsive to local advocacy groups and may have established "hands-off" policies when local disputes arise.

Although it varies by state, funding available for school districts from state departments of education can amount to a large percentage of the total costs for school facility improvements. Funding formulas, often based on existing debt service and real estate valuations, can vary from 0% up to 100% financial support. School districts who are able to access the vast majority of their capital funding from the state see this as a windfall, with little cost to their local constituents, and are thus anxious to take advantage of the opportunity to address their facility needs. Such districts tend to favor new construction, since whatever costs are involved are paid largely by others, making it more difficult to make a case for preservation of older schools. School districts receiving a lesser share tend to be more amenable to renovation options when it can be shown that renovation reduces the cost of the overall building program and thus, the local share.

School facility evaluations: Many school districts hire architect/planning consultants early on to perform school facility evaluations for all the schools in the district. Such evaluations tend to be very superficial and are used to determine the broad outlines of need.

Full text available at:
http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/school_study_roadmap.pdf

For more information about the National Trust's historic neighborhood schools initiative, contact:

Western Office (AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, WA): Mike Buhler, 415-956-0610

Mountains/Plains Office (CO, KS, MT, ME, ND, SD, UT, WY): John Mitterholzer, 303-623-1504

Midwest Office (IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, MO, OH, WI): Royce Yeater, 312-939-5547

Southwest Office (AR, NM, OK, TX): Megan Brown, 817-332-4398

Southern Office (AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, PR, SC, TN, VI): Mary Ruffin Hanbury, 843-722-8552

Southern Field Office (DC, MD, VA, WV): Rob Nieweg, 202-588-6107

Northeast Field Office (DE, NJ, PA): Adrian Scott Fine, 215 848-8033

Northeast Office (CT, MA, ME, NH, NY, RI, VT): Marilyn Fenollosa, 617-523-0885

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robert Nieweg
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

EF 006 225

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Evaluators that favor new schools tend to place major emphasis on deficiencies related to:

- ❑ Questionable structural integrity
- ❑ Codes and life safety
- ❑ Molds and the "sick building syndrome"
- ❑ Lead paint
- ❑ Asbestos
- ❑ Outdated technology
- ❑ Classroom size

While these are often real concerns, they can be overly dramatized by evaluators as irreparable conditions, and then used to promote replacement as the only reasonable response to an irredeemable situation. It is possible to alter the initial judgment by evaluators with further study, and the final decision on the merit or feasibility of renovation of any particular school building lies with the local school board. Yet the first perception of a school documented in the initial evaluation tends to stick in the minds of school board members and the public. That can make it more difficult to later make a case for preservation.

Experience demonstrates that communities who have been able to identify schools considered historic before or during the initial survey tend to focus attention on those selected schools, as the board and consultants are influenced by historic status and/or clearly expressed local sentiment. Experience also suggests that anticipating the negative hype in the evaluation and countering it early with case studies of successful renovation of schools in similar condition helps significantly to bring the decision making process back into balance.

Inflated school renovation cost estimates and prejudices: As many school boards and their architects may be unfamiliar with, or biased against, renovation alternatives, cost estimates for school renovations are often inflated. School districts should be encouraged to select architects and consultants that are experienced with the renovation of historic schools.

Preservation advocates can also encourage a second, more detailed evaluation of selected schools by a design professional experienced in renovation work, commissioned either by the local school district or hired by the preservation advocates.

Recognize, however, that prejudice against renovation, a process inherently more complex and risk prone than building new, is common throughout the construction industry, and particularly within the large firms which have been attracted to a statewide building program of this magnitude.

State reimbursement rules: State reimbursement policies can favor the building of new schools against the upgrading of existing schools. Although the percentages vary by state, these are commonly seen as the so-called "60%" or "2/3rd's" rule.

For instance, if the cost of renovating a school exceeds 60% of the cost of a new school, the school district should build a new school if they want to receive financial reimbursement from the state. There is no real basis for these types of rules. It seems to stem from the false assumption that older schools are somehow so "worn out" that continued investment above a certain level in unwise. In fact, any school which retains its structural integrity in large measure can be renovated by the installation of new systems, finishes, and amenities to produce a useful life commensurate with, and sometimes even exceeding, new construction.

The question is, "at what cost?" Preservation advocates argue for parity. If the cost of renovation exceeds the cost of new construction, replacement should be considered. Until that level of expenditure is reached, renovation is the more frugal course, and thus the wise use of tax resources, whether those dollars come from the local or the state level.

Acreage standards: Many state education departments either mandate or recommend a minimum number of acres for elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

Some states apply guidelines similar to those recommended by the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI), while other states have developed their own formulas. Elementary schools, for instance, are required in some states to have 7 acres, plus 1 acre for each 100 students in enrollment. This prescription has no basis in educational need, and seems to have emerged from suburban standards where broad school playgrounds are often considered community parks.

Since older schools were usually built on restricted sites in neighborhood settings, such standards can easily render them obsolete. The remedy is either to relocate the school on available land outside the neighborhood (if it can be found), or demolish housing to clear adjacent property. Just seven acres for an elementary school requires about 3.5 city blocks.

Understand the Perspective of the Educator and the Community

Find your target audience: Who makes decisions about schools in your community and state? In most instances this is the school board, superintendent, and parents. Instead of trying to reach everyone, concentrate on your target audience. Determine what you'll need to do to persuade the small group of people who can actually change things. Identify your audience's key values and work from there. Think strategically about your audience and the best ways to reach them. It means making your case in a way that will be compelling to your target audience.

Recognize the needs of the children: The community will be focused on the needs of the children. While preservation advocates are rightly concerned about the loss of historic resources and the preservation of the older schools that serve our historic neighborhoods, it is critical that the needs of the children of our state and our community come first.

No one would reasonably argue that our children should be exposed to educationally inadequate facilities in order to preserve the historic integrity of our schools. All pronouncements from the preservation community must begin with a statement of support for state-of-the-art schools for our children and support for the districts' building improvement program. But since state-of-the-art schools do not have to be brand new schools, preservationists can also argue that our children are best educated in high quality architectural environments which evoke a sense of the past, a continuity with earlier generations, and facilities closely linked to their community when those are available.

Agree that one standard should be set for educational facilities and measure the feasibility of adapting our older schools to that standard. Nothing less will be acceptable.

Consider the educator's point of view: It would be naïve to not notice that the process of building all new facilities can be an ego trip for school boards and administrators. But to assume that is the motivation is also simplistic. School boards and administrators face difficult tasks today, with myriad pressures on each and every decision they make. They function in a world dictated by legislative mandates, under intense scrutiny by parents, citizens, employers, and the press. They too often spar with their own labor source. They strive to educate children whose attention is too often diverted by social problems at home. Facilities are, in many ways the least of their concerns, as they struggle to improve student performance and outcomes under tight budget constraints.

There is a temptation to claim that if existing school facilities were good enough for us when we were in school, they are good enough for the current generation, and blame the school board for letting them go to ruin. Instead, recognize that the expectations of our schools have risen dramatically over the last 30 years, as schools have assumed an ever-widening role in our society.

Today our schools teach values, enforce behaviors, and offer an array of programs unimagined in earlier generations, from Title IX sports gender equity, to English as a second language, to inclusion of those with various physical and mental disabilities. All of these programs and expectations really have made many of our older schools unresponsive to today's educational needs.

Be sensitive to socio-economic and racial issues: Because schools have been used as a vehicle of social conformity and the suppression of minorities, and later as instruments of social engineering, all school issues can be charged with residual resentment. In many inner city neighborhoods, years of dis-investment in public facilities and particularly the schools has created bitterness and an air of rightful suspicion. Advocating preservation can be interpreted as either the latest tool by which the majority will maintain the status quo. Preservation can also be seen as a prelude to gentrification that drives the economically disadvantaged from their homes.

Make an extra effort in such neighborhoods and groups to clarify a commitment to improving school facilities and to school equity. Language can be important. Making a case for "renovation of schools" and not "preservation" may help avoid negative implications of historic preservation.

Maintain civility: Understand and acknowledge that school board and professional educators are trying to do the right thing. Articulate a case for preservation in support of their efforts, without denigrating their performance. Maintain a civil and polite demeanor at all meetings and in all conversations. "Hysterical Preservationists" will not win favor.

Anticipate the process: Plan for the best and worst-case scenarios. To avoid the crisis that leads to emotional confrontations, get proactive early. In many instances, state agencies and departments of education provide timetables and schedules for facility projects online.

Local papers regularly cover school board meetings, so if not before, tune in at the earliest conversations about school facility planning. Know deadlines, how to get on agendas, and ultimately be invited to the table and become a player. Then, in the order appropriate to your situation:

- ❑ Organize preservation and neighborhood advocates to discuss how you will reach out to be a constructive player in school facility planning decisions.
- ❑ Educate all local preservation leaders with the materials referenced here from published sources and online.
- ❑ Inventory local schools to identify those potentially eligible for designation as local landmarks or listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Few communities have surveyed their schools for historic significance, so this will likely require some primary research. Contact your State Historic Preservation Office for criteria and advice.
- ❑ Document the history and unique qualities of your best schools and publish your work, online or in print, to gain credibility and widen awareness. Include visuals.
- ❑ Create a public forum to present your research as a slide show of your best historic schools and those supporting historic neighborhoods. Visuals are critical to illustrate quality and diversity.
- ❑ Launch a School History Project through local PTA's or neighborhood groups to get kids and their families to know the story of their school and the role it has played in the life of the neighborhood and community.
- ❑ Rank and prioritize schools to identify the importance of each.
- ❑ Approach the school board to offer your work to the local school administration to guide their planning work. At the same time, request an opportunity to participate in any committees that will study options or guide the facility planning process.
- ❑ Remain flexible through the process. Expect to loose some schools; one cannot be a team player and expect to get your way on every issue.

Organize Stakeholders

Engage the school community: Involve everyone you can think of who has a stake in the schools issue. Begin with parents and teachers, either individually, of if possible, through their organizational entities like PTA, unions, etc.

Form alliances: Reach out to neighbors and neighborhood associations who naturally understand the importance of a neighborhood school but may need to be educated on the value and potential of the existing school building. For newly formed groups with little credibility or track record, enlist help from more established partners, through letters of support, site visits, presentations, news articles and testimonials.

Remember that many lack the vision to be able to see the potential of a facility they know only as a deteriorated property. Conduct a tour to point out the school's extant charm and recite history to help them see the potential. Similarly approach City and County elected and planning officials whom often understand the importance of the linkage between neighborhood and school. Seek out alumni groups, retired teachers, school reform advocates, and smart growth advocates, all of who should have some affinity for the cause. Even anti-tax advocates can be partners, since they are often concerned about the impact of a massive construction program on tax levies and often see the economies of renovation as an alternative to wholesale replacement.

With each group, state your concerns, share some outline of your position if possible, and invite them to join you in a constructive dialog. Explore common interests, and listen carefully to their concerns. Universal agreement is not necessary, as long as the common ground is well defined.

Bring in the experts: The outside expert can often say the same thing as you but know that their credentials can sometimes get more attention from the school district and the media. They might also find an outside expert more persuasive and trustworthy. Strategically call on the National Trust for Historic Preservation, your statewide preservation organization and state historic preservation office for help. At key times, such as a large public meeting, experts can provide testimony and bolster your local efforts. They can also meet with school officials, talk with the media, or write letters of support.

Plan for Obstacles and Success

Seek funding to support your effort:

Seek financial support from supporters throughout the process. Rarely is such an advocacy program fundable from outside the constituency. Make it clear to all who share concerns for older schools that it will take a financial commitment as well as a personal commitment to make a difference.

Use such funds to defray out of pocket expenses of the advocacy effort. Some funding may be available from philanthropic sources to publish surveys and to help explore alternative feasibility studies if the school district is not approaching that process evenhandedly. But the schools are part of the heritage of each community alone, and the responsibility for their preservation lies in the concerned citizenry of that community.

Recognize the human factor: Know that "burnout" is likely, especially considering that many efforts to save historic schools take time to settle. Avoid burnout and loss of momentum by shifting roles and responsibilities.

Over time, leaders will come and go, impacting your group's enthusiasm, commitment and general effectiveness. Tag team members as group leaders and continually rotate members. Find your talent pools and plug into the needed roles (ex. graphic designer to help with the newsletter, fliers). Put team together and start by identifying the roles of who will do what in the process.

Confront the Challenge

Understand the case for replacement:

Listen carefully to the case for replacement of older schools. Since there is no inherently positive argument, advocates of replacement must almost always state their case in terms of negatives or inadequacies of the existing schools. Use this to advantage by documenting the arguments and then addressing them one by one.

They will likely begin with a litany of maintenance concerns. Acknowledge that older schools need maintenance but point out that the older buildings have received only band aids in recent years and that a major renovation would renew the systems to last another 50-70 years with no more maintenance than new building require.

Another common argument is that the facility is too small, either in whole or in part. Point out that renovation often involves sensitive additions and that remodeling often reallocates existing space to meet today's needs. Individual classrooms that are too small can be used for the many small group functions now a part of school programming, or reconfigured at minimal cost by moving non-bearing party walls.

Inadequate technology is often cited as a concern with older schools. Since older schools commonly have high ceilings and/or tunnel systems, routing communication cable throughout the building is not difficult, and costs no more than in new construction.

A leaky envelope is another commonly cited deficiency warranting replacement. Leaks almost always relate to roofing and windows. Both are chronic when maintenance has been spotty or of poor quality. A substantial renovation will address these matters with new roofs, and often new windows at a quality level at least comparable to new construction. And ask if the maintenance staff has ever had a chronic roof leak on a new building. It is all too common.

Safety is another major area of deficiency commonly used to discredit historic schools. Agree that compliance with critical life safety issues in important and that only detailed analysis can test the feasibility of remodeling to meet safety concerns. Safety arguments against renovating an historic school are often made in an overly dramatic way to create a scare effect. Below are some examples:

- Structural integrity is often questioned and stories told of a gymnasium roof collapse in some other community. Getting professional engineers to attest to the soundness of any existing structural element can be difficult in today's litigious world, and even their qualifying statements on perfectly sound buildings can cast aspersion. If the integrity of structural elements is impugned, demand the elements be exposed with selective demolition and fully evaluated in situ.
- Code violations are often cited as endangering student safety. Remember that there are different codes for existing buildings and new construction and that the critical element of any code is the life safety section (NFPA 101). Other sections of the building code are prescriptive based on current construction technology so evaluators can often find numerous technical violations. Focus on the real threat to safety and the "spirit" or intent of the code rather than its miniscule details.

- Molds are often cited as an indication of a "sick building". Remember that mold abatement from selected walls in chronically damp areas is not that difficult or expensive. The extensive presence of molds is ventilations systems is serious and likely requires the replacement of much of the system, but know that new buildings are often experiencing molds in ventilation systems within a few years of construction, so a new school offers no assurance that the district will not face this challenge anyway.
- Lead paint poses a threat if consumed or inhaled by children. Options include complete abatement or containment where it is exposed to such intake. These treatments are not exotic or particularly difficult. They can add some expense that must be factored into the cost equation, but beware the tendency to overly dramatize the risk and the cost.
- Asbestos must have already been documented and abated or contained with a regular documented inspection management plan under the AHERA law applying to all school facilities. Still, its presence can frighten parents and teachers. Shortly after the passage of AHERA in the 1980's, when all school districts suddenly needed to address asbestos abatement to be in compliance, the small industry that did such work was overwhelmed and costs skyrocketed. Today, the field in competitive and the costs reasonable. It is now a routine aspect of building renovation.

Secure and offer technical assistance from pro bono design professionals sympathetic to and experienced in preservation to offset the bias often found in school architects and construction managers with a vested interest in new construction.

The other common argument for replacement is that renovating a building in use is disruptive to education. Point out that schools can often be renovated in phases over the summer and that watching the process of renovation can also be an educational experience for students.

There is often an abiding skepticism of the feasibility of renovation and an assumption of inflexibility of older facilities. This is born of limited truth but each building is unique, and as preservationists know, older buildings are usually far more flexible than is commonly understood.

Use success stories as case studies to illustrate how older schools can meet 21st Century educational needs at reasonable cost and show illustrations of those schools to help those without vision or imagination see the potential of their older schools.

But it is still true that some schools can be feasibly renovated and others not. Argue that an objective analysis by an experienced design professional is the only way to test the feasibility of renovation, and indicate your preparedness to accept such a study.

Make a Case for Renovation

Be prepared to debate renovation vs. replacement options: A feasibility study of the issues involved in renovation is the only tested way to evaluate the fit of an old building to contemporary educational uses (see the National Trust's publication, "Historic Schools: Renovation vs. Replacement & the Role of a Feasibility Study").

It is critical this study be executed with great objectivity and fairness, and given the prejudices within the construction industry for new construction, select a design team with experience in renovating historic schools.

Also as indicated above, a fair evaluation requires a level playing field in which the less expensive option is the preferred option and no arbitrary cost standards are imposed. This means that the preservation community must accept the results if fairly executed, with one potential exception. That exception relates to the value inherent in some older schools that are just not available in new construction:

- Large and handsome windows, a common feature of older schools rarely available today
- Decorative woodwork and tile
- Terrazzo or wood floors, available but rarely afforded in new schools today
- High ceilings and grand spaces
- Artwork in the form of murals or other special features
- By focusing not just on cost but on value, some extraordinary schools may warrant expenditures for renovation that exceeds the cost of new construction.

Also note that renovation commonly generates more jobs in the immediate community, because it is more labor intensive, so there is an economic benefit to preservation. And also make the case that renovation is recycling, and conveys an ethic to students and the community that we care about the natural environment enough to avoid the waste of good resources

There is a common perception that new construction is maintenance free. While maintenance costs may diminish for a year or two after a major construction project (new or renovated), deferral of maintenance is how all buildings deteriorate. The more chronic the deferral, the more geometric the rate of deterioration.

Most new school buildings actually require more maintenance over time, since they lack the quality construction of an earlier era (plaster rather than wallboard, mortar rather than caulk, terrazzo rather than carpet). Also challenge the life expectancy of new construction. Will the new school last 25 or 50 years?

Appeal to the heart and mind: Motivating people often starts with an emotional chord. It is essential to engage peoples' passion, whether the issue is saving a historic school or their children's education. Reach them emotionally first and then concentrate on the facts. These values are usually subjective and intangible, but can be discussed as issues without placing a dollar value upon them. These include the sentimental arguments, the linkages historic schools make to earlier generations, the people that have come and gone, and the value a sense of tradition, and continuity within the community.

Ask alumni groups, retired teachers, and others so inclined to make the case for renovation publicly, and create opportunities for them to do so. Summarize by pointing out that new has its value of being fresh and bright, but renovation can be both new and historic.

While good to emphasize, don't rely on the heritage or "feel good" stories to make the save. You will still need other back ups, like economics where it will be easier to gain attention of the decision-makers who are more likely to listen to the bottom line.

Anticipate being opposed: Based on your audience's key values – such as quality education, new sports facilities, up-to-date technology – you will also have an idea where your effort may be vulnerable from your opponents. Be ready for this to prevent or preempt those attacks.

Set aside personalities – from both the opposition and internally within your organization – and stick to issues. Don't stoop to opposition's level, become involved in altercations or be "baited" into making your group look foolish.

From the start, send a clear message on what you want. Don't be wishy-washy or go back and forth on the goal. Otherwise you'll lose credibility and respect and will be less likely to be taken serious. Don't be bullied by false arguments, heated debates or intimidated by authority figures or the opposition's own outside experts.

Become an advisor: Request that the school board form an advisory committee to evaluate consultant's feasibility reports and recommendations. Ensure that committee membership represents all historic neighborhood schools being studied within the community. This will provide effective representation, division of labor, and recognition of the importance of consensus recommendations. Work with the committee to create written reports outlining recommendations to be presented to the school board.

Use success stories: To help people envision the potential of their old schools thoroughly renovated, research success stories and identify historic schools that work. Present examples of these through good photographs and data demonstrating the way in which the older facility meets contemporary standards. The closer these examples are to your community, the better. Find them in the community or within the state.

National examples are being collected by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and are available on line (**www.nthp.org/Issues/schools/studies_Intro.html**). If examples are available within travel distance, arrange a bus tour of interested parties and photograph and video for display and presentation back home. Have ready for discussion comparable success stories for each deficiency and issue raised by replacement advocates.

Work all angles: Where possible, buy time and identify ways to delay the process to build support and explore renovation alternatives. Determine if there is any other review or approval process required for project, such as local land use or zoning variances.

Consider the indirect cost of sprawl schools: If the location of a replacement school involves an outlying, undeveloped site, it can also be argued that the related costs of sprawl should be considered in the cost equation, even if those costs are borne by other governmental budgets. These include:

- ❑ Land acquisition and preparation
- ❑ Roadway and utility extensions
- ❑ Busing costs
- ❑ Fire and police service extensions

Issues related to the effects of school policies on historic neighborhood schools and the way in which

school location can facilitate sprawl are detailed in the National Trust's publication, "Why Johnny Can't Walk to School: Historic Neighborhood Schools in the Age of Sprawl" available on line at **www.nthp.org/Issues/schoolsSum.pdf**

Know that size matters: There is an intuitive understanding, substantiated by a growing body of research literature, that small schools are more effective. In a small school, studies show that students perform better academically because everyone tends to know one another and it's tougher for kids to slip through the cracks. Additional studies show that students in smaller schools have better attendance, drop out less and take part in more extracurricular activities than those in larger schools. (see **www.edfacilities.org/rl/size.cfm#journals**).

Teachers also tend to collaborate more in small schools and are better able to personalize instruction to meet individual students' needs. Another benefit of small schools is the ability of staff to keep an eye on students so kids get into less trouble resulting in fewer instances of violence overall.

Michael Carr, a spokesman for the National Association of Secondary School Principals says "what you get (with fewer students) is more attention, a safer climate, and a school that can be more unified." In a comparison of large schools of 1,000 or more students with small schools of fewer than 300 students, the U.S. Department of Education found the larger schools had more violent crime, vandalism and fights and assaults. The Chicago-based Small Schools Coalition (**www.smallschools.org**) recommends no more than 350 students at the elementary level and 500 students at the secondary.

Since older schools tend to be small, make the case that research now indicates that test performance is consistently higher in small schools. Small schools not only improve academic performance, but they improve management of behaviors, social maturity, and participation in extracurricular activities.

Don't forget that pedestrian friendly neighborhood schools increase the activity level of students and help address growing concerns about juvenile obesity. And since small schools are most commonly neighborhood schools, their presence also supports property values and continued investment in established neighborhoods, reinforcing the tax base available to the schools for ongoing operational levies.

Develop a Communications Campaign

Create a clear, simple and concise message: Successful campaigns have clear goals and messages. Your message should be designed to achieve the goal of renovating your historic school. The message should resonate with your target audience. As school boards are comprised of people with busy schedules and they often resist change, connect with them by plugging in to their belief system to get their attention and support.

As soon as possible, develop a clear case statement of goals and arguments to support those goals. Supplement it with supporting documents as the issue develops but maintain consistency in the basic case.

Help your target audience and the public understand why saving your historic school is important. Why is it important now? The public wants to understand this, what they can do, and how to do it.

Pursue communications activities that move you closer to your goal of renovation. Ask yourself with each strategy and decision: does this move me closer to my stated goal?

Form a communications committee: Integrate a communications committee to continually communicate and reinforce the message. Recruit experienced communications professional or community activists familiar with the techniques of public advocacy, and maintain them as a standing resource to respond to shifting issues and unexpected turns.

Clear up misconceptions: As historic school buildings are being considered for closing, demolition and replacement, be ready to respond to a variety of myths regarding their inability to be retrofitted and adapted for continued use. Misconceptions and miss-truths can be very harmful and distract from the real issues. Some common myths include:

Myth: The State will not reimburse communities for the renovation of school buildings.

Fact: Most state departments of education do provide funding for renovation, often at equal levels to new construction.

Myth: Historic school buildings don't meet state Department of Education requirements.

Fact: Facility guidelines are often just recommendations, not law.

Myth: It costs more to renovate a historic school than to build a new one.

Fact: Renovation often saves money compared to the cost of building a new school. The cost per square foot for new construction should also factor in the 1) costs of new site acquisition and preparation; 2) old site demolition and disposal of construction waste or stabilization; 3) the costs of creating a new infrastructure (water, sewer, etc.) at the new site; and 4) the cost of transporting the children to the new site once the school is completed.

Myth: Historic schools can't meet the needs of today's students.

Fact: Needs for modern libraries, state-of-the-art technology, science labs, "cafetoriums," and special needs rooms can be met within historic schools. In addition, older schools may offer additional amenities usually sparred in new schools, including classrooms with abundant natural light with operable windows providing fresh air.

Myth: Historic school buildings have classrooms that are too small and cannot be enlarged.

Fact: Many historic schools can be adapted to meet modern requirements for classroom size.

Myth: Historic schools cannot accommodate acreage standards required for modern schools.

Fact: Small school sites can be creatively and effectively designed to accommodate the needs of the school without consuming any new land. Optimal acreage standards are also often guidelines, not law. There also may be opportunities for sharing other facilities within the same community.

Acknowledge the positive and challenge the negative: Use the communications committee and other opportunities to highlight any positive turn of events. Begin with an offering of kudos to the school district for any constructive action, such as a recent renovation project, honest open dialogs, participatory decision making etc. when it is sincere. Politely but firmly challenge insincere activities by the schools.

Get the word out: Ideally, participation in the planning process as outlined above will yield a school board proposal which integrates preservation as an integral part of the plan. Either way – either in support of the plan, or in opposition to provisions which ignored preservation – as the issue comes to a head on a ballot for the local funding share, be prepared to get the word out by all the means:

- ❑ Op Ed case statement
- ❑ Letters to the editor
- ❑ Mailing lists of stakeholders/partners
- ❑ Door to door visits
- ❑ Yard signs
- ❑ Talk radio and radio advertising
- ❑ Host or organize participation in town meetings

Cultivate a relationship with the media: Media coverage can either help or hurt efforts to save your historic school building. Do not be intimidated by the media and instead cultivate relationships with reporters.

Designate a good media spokesperson from your organization. Select someone who is articulate, up to speed on the issues and available when the media calls. Make it easy for the media by feeding them facts and information and working around their deadlines.

Be sure to thank the media, recognize their efforts when they write favorable articles and invite them to your meetings. Timing is everything. Know what will get the media's attention (ex. stage a protest/march, create posters for visual effect, etc.)

Use technology to build support: Develop phone and e-mail "trees" with a variety of individuals to support your effort. Create a list-serv to keep everyone "in the loop" on the latest news and upcoming events to avoid time-consuming meetings. Use e-mail strategically to rally and involve more people. Focus on up-to-the minute updates and briefs to advocates stressing why right now is important, why their support important, what they can do, and how they can do it. Use your talents and do a quick scan of your group to see who is "computer friendly" and can help with designing a web page, e-mail network, desk-top publishing, etc.

Maintain a web site: To make the case for renovation, and keep your supporters informed throughout the process, maintain a simple web site. Invite others to join the cause.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Historic Neighborhood Schools Initiative is aimed at leveling the playing field and putting renovation of historic neighborhood schools on an equal footing with construction of new schools. We believe that preserving historic neighborhood schools is of great importance not only to the historic preservation community, but also to advocates of better schools and better environments for school children. The National Trust has developed a multi-year strategic plan to promote the continued use of historic neighborhood school buildings as schools. This fact sheet cites Information from various sources, including National Trust publications, A Community Guide to Saving Older Schools, and Why Johnny Can't Walk to School
www.nthp.org/main/abouttrust/schoolshome.html

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

X	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").